NGO CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Social Development: A New Definition for Security in the Post-Cold War World

From 8-10 September 1993, the 46th Annual NGO/DPI Conference, held at United Nations Headquarters, focused its attention on the new definition of security in the post-Cold War world and in preparation for the World Summit on Social Development to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark in March 1995. This Annual Conference for NGOs, planned in cooperation with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, drew 1,400 participants, representing more than 370 NGOs from 45 countries and many United Nations agencies and missions. Throughout the three days, speaker after speaker urged the redirection of resources from military to human security as the central focus of international action today. Participants agreed overwhelmingly that social development is indeed the new and proper definition of security.

Taking a regional perspective, the Conference focused on three major themes: alleviation of poverty, social integration and productive employment. Across regions and across issues, the situation of women emerged consistently. In all regions, they are the most disempowered and the greatest hope for economic and social progress.

The end of the Cold War has brought neither peace nor the peace dividend. It has exposed, even exacerbated, the long-hidden bitter roots of massive poverty, ecological degradation, and pervasive discrimination that have placed nearly one billion people into such abject poverty that they cannot take care of their most basic needs. These devastating conditions, incomprehensible and immoral in themselves, are a major cause of violence.

The Agenda for Peace is the Agenda for Development

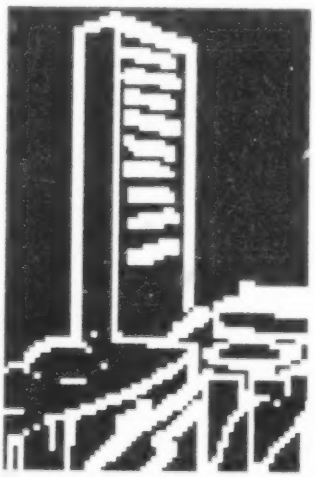
Boutros Boutros-Ghali, United Nations Secretary-General, said: "The agenda for peace is the agenda for development." It is crucial to develop a coordinated, comprehensive, long-term strategy to effectively address the problems of underdevelopment and end the vicious circle of poverty and violence. Such an ambitious, all-encompassing undertaking will require, as never before, a unique and powerful partnership among governments, NGOs, and UN agencies. They must clearly demonstrate the link between human rights and social and economic development. They must shift from an emphasis on short-term emergency relief to long-term development.

Institutions that have the power to take action must also exercise the political will. Governments must redirect their national budgets from weapons to people, and donors their bottom line from GNP to carefully-targeted human needs that include sustainable job creation, alleviation of poverty at the grassroots level, health and education -- with a special emphasis on women and girls -- and social integration of the most vulnerable groups. That it needs to be done is not in doubt. In concrete terms, what can be done and how, are the difficult and crucial questions.

No Peace, No Dividend

The end of the Cold War has brought neither the long hoped-for peace nor its peace dividend. As nations in transition in Eastern and Central Europe and in the developing world turn inward, erupting into old ethnic and territorial conflicts, the number of refugees and other victims of war have increased. Deprived of their homes, health, education, opportunity and capacity for work, their lives are physically and spiritually impoverished as they add to the overall economic burden of their nations.

While the Cold War may have ended between East and West, the South is still feeling its effects. Military budgets in developing countries have not decreased, while some industrialized donor nations and agencies have lost their "political" incentives to aid developing nations. This is especially so in sub-Saharan Africa, where so many countries received aid to serve as buffers between East and West and where military and debt-related expenditures approach 15 per cent of their total budgets. And as developing nations continue to buy arms, donor nations continue to supply them.



NGO CONFERENCE

The Battle for Survival Escalates

But as the end of the Cold War has exposed underlying social problems as the cause of unrest and ensuing conflict, the equally harsh battle for survival goes on. The battle for physical, psychological, social, and spiritual existence escalates. Peace initiatives need to foster a close link between physical and human security. Reductions in military budgets must finance health and education programmes. The "New World Order" must be people centered.

Forty-eight years ago, the United Nations was established as the world body for peace, security, and development. Since 1945, it has focused its peace-keeping efforts on establishing and maintaining military security. Now the UN must fulfill the third part of its mandate, and turn its attention to human security through development.

Poverty, the Greatest Threat to Security

The largest and most devastating threats to security are poverty and social disintegration -- more threatening than, and the causes of, military conflict. This includes the complex and interrelated conditions of hunger and malnutrition, discrimination against women and every other vulnerable group in society -- the disabled, the homeless, indigenous peoples, the elderly, refugees from war and internal displacement, the unemployed.

The Marginalized are the Mainstream

The marginalized are the mainstream. They represent 80 per cent of the global community. Statistics suggest that deprivation, abuse, and violence directed at marginal populations are more a social norm than an aberration. There is no "whole" into which those outside the system can be easily integrated.

Doubled since the 1980s, the number of refugees worldwide now stands at 19 million people -- homeless, underfed, undereducated, separated from their families, and spiritually and economically destitute.

The threats to human security include the debilitating effects of a growing narcotics/arms trade, the devastating impact of economic adjustment policies, degradation of the environment and degradation of the human spirit, trafficking in children and child prostitution, and a deepening polarization between rich and poor -- people and nations. Unemployment leads to insecurity, family violence, crime, and war. Mal-development is a root cause of social unrest and conflict. People without food, homes, jobs, education or dignity fall easy prey to false promises and "simple" political solutions.

The poor can be empowered only if they are healthy and educated. Reintegration and rehabilitation of refugees must go hand in hand.

Women, the Key to Transformation

Women and children constitute 80 per cent of refugees. They make up two-thirds of the world's illiterate and the majority of the marginalized. They are further disempowered by HIV/AIDS because of their traditional roles, including their exclusion from sexual decision-making. Women with HIV are generally younger than their male counterparts and thus are stricken in their most productive years. Women are the primary household managers, provide the primary healthcare of the sick and elderly, and in many countries are the primary workers in agriculture.

Moreover, women's work is not counted in the GNP. The concept of productive employment values traditional paid male labor and ignores traditional unpaid female labor. Women themselves often do not see their work as "work." In the Caribbean, for example, the many women who are heads of households do not regard themselves as "heads of households." Paid work and women's reproductive rights must be linked; women cannot enter many segments of the labor market because of childcare and home responsibilities. UNIFEM is concerned about the impact of MERCOSUR (Market of the South) and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) on women.

States are Not Gender Neutral

States are not gender neutral, as women have been systematically excluded from the process of defining national and global problems and shaping their solutions. Among the most marginalized, women are also the greatest hope for the future. Among the most vulnerable, they have the potential to be the most powerful partners. The correlation between the level of female education and the level of a nation's economic and social development is direct and well-established. When women are educated, family income increases; infant mortality, malnutrition, and family size decline. For a woman to gain her place in the world, the girl-child must receive -- from infancy -- equal love, nutrition, health, education, respect, and responsibility.

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The transformation of exploitative social, economic, and political structures must be coupled with the transformation of gender relationships. Women must be the focal point of change at all community and national levels. Women must share in the restructuring of society and its institutions. They are stakeholders in the policy process of their nations and stockholders in their future.

A New Direction for Development

GNP can no longer be the measuring stick for successful development. A new standard must be developed, a new direction, that uses as its criteria equal access to resources, institutions, and services, respect for human rights, acceptance of diverse cultures, equitable laws, and administration of justice.

Development is a comprehensive and participatory process which involves the entire community, and whose purpose is the full realization of human beings in all respects and for which there is no single or previously established model. The difficulty of developing indicators to measure social progress should be a challenge, not a deterrent. Many speakers at the Conference pointed out that the World Bank and the IMF are already responding to pressure to move in this new direction, while others said that their change was more "public relations" than reality.

A 20/20 Vision

20/20 vision requires that 20 per cent of government spending and 20 per cent of development assistance flow into human development. To replace GNP, the Human Development Index (HDI) was introduced in 1990, combining life expectancy, educational achievement and the ratio between purchasing power and national product. A Political Freedom Index (PFI) was suggested to measure the existence of a legitimate government, the extent of free expression, political participation, and equal opportunity.

"Holistic development leads to holistic peace."

The spirit of Gandhi's words were repeated throughout the Conference. Ethics and spirituality are essential to shaping a secure global peace and security. Solutions to alleviation of poverty, social integration, and productive employment must be approached holistically.

Culture and religion should play a role in the design and spirit of a new civil society.

The Road from Rio to Copenhagen

The Social Summit in 1995 will be the first time that Heads of State come together to address the issue of social development. What happens in Copenhagen, said Boutros Boutros-Ghali, will determine the direction of the United Nations for the next 20 years.

Many speakers drew comparisons between the Rio Earth Summit process and the process leading to the Social Summit. They noted a progression of linked priorities with a stronger and stronger NGO presence. Rio was about the relationships between humans and nature; Copenhagen will be about the relationships between humans and humans. A major advance resulting from Rio was to acknowledge that the reduction of poverty is central to environmental preservation and resource management. At the Social Summit it will be essential to connect social and economic factors. The Summit must see human development as a tool of preventive diplomacy linked to peacebuilding.

The United Nations: From Governments to People

Although the United Nations Charter established the elimination of poverty as a major goal, for the past 48 years, military security has occupied its full attention. Today, as the Cold War has ended and the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations approaches, the time is now to reevaluate goals, redirect energies and resources, and to move from a reactive to a proactive world body. This Conference and preparation for the upcoming Social Summit show a new readiness to act on the old knowledge that peace must be people - and not government-centered; that it depends on human, not military security.

For the United Nations to take its proper leadership role, the governments individually and collectively must:

-- Act as a catalyst for positive change to reduce economic, social, and military pressures, and increase prospects of human security everywhere.

-- Ensure that agencies for defence will focus on peace, political stability, and participatory governance.

-- Establish social development guidelines for all UN agencies.

A NEW DIRECTION

-- Establish a new economic security council to serve as a regular forum for global economic decision-making at the highest level.

-- Become more communication- and less information-oriented to allow for real interaction and participation.

-- Institute a freeze on military spending by poor nations and the selling of arms by rich ones.

NGOs: Cooperation is the Key Word

Public recognition of NGO work in the field and their influence within the United Nations system have dramatically increased in recent years. But now that the issues of social development are on the international agenda, NGOs must continue to increase their impact by building on their greatest strength -- advocacy -- and by developing new strengths - working cooperatively. To become even more effective advocates, NGOs acknowledge they must establish or improve partnerships, coalitions, alliances, and networks among NGOs at all levels from the local community to the international, between NGOs and governments, the United Nations and the multilateral institutions.

To further their impact they must:

-- Make sure that economic and social issues are linked.

-- Insist that the ECE(Economic Commission of Europe) include social issues in its formal structure.

-- Ensure an active NGO role in the Social Summit preparation and follow-up as well as in the 50th Anniversary Preparatory Committee meetings.

-- Develop strategies with organizations like the World Bank to aid the unserved in truly effective ways.

-- Focus on the establishment of long-range, workable solutions that prioritize human-centered needs: prevention of rapid population growth, education of women and girls, training for women and youth, integration of family-planning programmes with primary health care, employment, income-generating, vocational and training programmes for women and young people.

-- Spark implementation of Agenda 21.

-- Demand the peace dividend and that resulting military savings are placed in long-term human capital projects.

-- Demand that developing countries reduce their military spending and that industrialized countries reduce their arms sales.

-- Act as a voice for the unempowered so that they will be included in economic and social policy-making.

-- Fill in the gaps created by decreases in social spending and pressure governments to restore services.

-- Generate resources through proper planning and technical assistance.

-- Link peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy with the issues treated by the Summit.

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